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ABSTRACT

The paper presents summaries of round table discussions in which 24 special educators from 21 nations considered the following four topics: the delivery of special education to exceptional youth; the selection, preparation, and improvement of personnel involved in educating exceptional youth; the improvement and facilitation of research activities and the application of research findings; and the improvement of international communication regarding all aspects of special education. Listed are basic principles regarding international information and assistance systems and future cooperative international activities. (CL)

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# FUTURES ROUND TABLE

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Report of Four Discussions at the First World Congress on Future Special Education, Stirling, Scotland, June 25-July 1, 1978

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## FUTURES ROUND TABLE

A feature of The Council for Exceptional Children's First World Congress on Future Special Education was the assembly of a group of 24 invited special educators from 21 nations and UNESCO in daily Round Table meetings to provide for explorations of strategies with regard to the future development of education for handicapped and gifted youth around the world. Within that broad focus was the more specific goals of considering the information and assistance needed by individual nations, consistent with their own national interests to improve their special education programs and the development of international systems which could contribute to that end.

To guide these discussions, four more narrowly drawn content areas in special education were stated for each of the four days of meetings. These included: (a) the delivery of special education to exceptional youth; (b) the selection, preparation and improvement of personnel involved in educating exceptional youth; (c) the improvement and facilitating of research activities and the application of research findings; and (d) the improvement of international communication regarding all aspects of educating exceptional youth.

Following is a brief description of the manner in which the Round Table was conducted, a summary of the content discussed, the principles established and agreed to by the discussants regarding international information and assistance systems, suggested future cooperative international activities, and finally, a specific proposal regarding Year of the Child activities to be initiated by CEC. A list of the discussants is found in the Appendix.

## The Futures Round Table Format

The format for the Futures Round Table was unique in that it was structured to involve participation on two clearly defined levels. The first level included the discussants who were invited to deal with discussion of the preselected content areas. These persons were seated at a conference table, identified by name plates, and were provided with some advance instructions. The second level of participation included other World Congress attendees who were seated around the table behind the discussants, which facilitated their observation, note-taking, and interaction, at specified times, with the Futures Round Table discussants.

Round Table discussions occurred throughout the Congress with formal meetings convened for two hours on each of four days. Each of the formal sessions was chaired by William C. Geer, Executive Director of The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). During each session, the topic was introduced by the chairperson and was followed with discussion by the discussants. Approximately 30 minutes at the end of each daily session was reserved for observer comment and interaction with the discussants. Because the Futures Round Table met concurrently with other Congress activities, all discussants were not able to attend all four sessions. It should be noted that individuals who participated in the Round Table discussions were not involved as representatives of their respective governments. The observers and other World Congress participants, however, did include registrants from 38 countries.

## The Delivery of Special Education to Exceptional Youth

The discussants at the Round Table dealt with a variety of issues from an international perspective pertaining to the delivery of special

education to exceptional youth. deLorenzo (Uruguay) stressed the need for minimum standards specifying the critical resources that are required in order to initiate services. Haskell (Australia) noted that before services should be provided, there must be basic assurances from governments that services will be provided. Others echoed the need for governmental mandates. Haskell went on to indicate that the issue of educating exceptional children is political and that sanctions must be available when services are denied. Otherwise, Haskell pointed out, mandates and resolutions are worthless. He cited, for example, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child adopted in 1959, which provides no basis for advocates to hold signatory nations accountable.

The history of the education of exceptional children, according to Jorgensen (Denmark) has shifted from private efforts to public responsibility. McKenna (Ireland) noted, however, that many voluntary organizations are suffering from the impact of inflation and need government support to continue to exist. He emphasized that non-government organizations are necessary to monitor services, but that government should be held responsible for the delivery of services. The Round Table discussants emphasized the crucial relationship that exists between a nation's resources and its national needs for the education of exceptional youth. Haskell noted that efforts to graft one nation's system of services on to another often fail because of the lack of sensitivity to the receiving nation's resources. Muller (South Africa) suggested the need for better research methods to ascertain national needs. Mitchell pointed out that the value systems and the economic contexts of any society must be taken into account when

planning a special education system.

Hardy (Canada) emphasized that the purpose of diagnosing children is to serve them and that labeling is only relevant if it leads to the provision of services. Emphasis should be given to educational placement rather than diagnostics noted Magne (Sweden). Muller thought it was a disservice to parents to make them aware of their child's problem and then not to provide the services. This situation, she said, is particularly acute where parents do not have the ability to obtain services on their own. Mehta (India) mentioned the interrelationship between medicine, social work and education, and emphasized its importance to exceptional children. She further cited the need to be able to train paraprofessional staff in developing nations to conduct multidisciplinary assessment. Mitchell (New Zealand) felt that assessment should be viewed as a multidisciplinary activity and should only be conducted with the parents present and/or advance knowledge. He also expressed concern that the more information gathered about a child, the greater the tendency to have gaps in the knowledge of any one professional regarding the child and that, consequently, one individual should be responsible for coordinating a child's assessment to see that all relevant information is obtained and shared. Geer (United States) stresses the need to involve exceptional persons in the planning and development of education programs concerning exceptional children.

Several participants, notably deLorenzo and Mehta, suggested the need to focus efforts on prevention of handicapping conditions. Egg (Switzerland), however, expressed concern that emphasis should be placed on those exceptional children who already exist because the results of

efforts to prevent handicapping conditions can only be effective in coming generations.

The Selection, Preparation and Improvement of Personnel

Jorgensen observed that there is wide agreement and, in fact, it is common knowledge that in order to meet the educational needs of handicapped youth, teams of various types of professionals must be involved. Mehta commented that in order to produce such professionals, information and training regarding the handicapped must be built into the training programs for the various disciplines. Specifically cited by Mehta were physicians, nurses, and social workers. Chua (Malaysia) emphasized that in developing nations, emphasis must be placed on training special education teachers who should also function as diagnosticians. Hardy pointed out that trained volunteers can contribute to programs for the handicapped, and particularly with regard to total family needs.

Recognition of the increasing involvement of regular educators in the education of exceptional youth was also noted by the delegates. deLorenzo commented on this direction and emphasized that the emphasis in training both regular and special educators must be on quality. Magne also spoke to this trend and called for greater emphasis upon training regular educators to improve their skills and ability to deal with exceptional children. He also indicated, that to some degree, school decisions are too much in the hands of experts and that more teacher involvement is a desirable goal. This comment was emphasized by a few of the observers.

While it was observed that in developing nations in particular there is a great need for personnel, Paraskevopoulos (Greece) indicated that some countries have the luxury of being able to select candidates for

training from an excess of interested persons. He stressed that in order to cope with this situation, it is essential that carefully determined selection criteria be developed. This need was supported by Bissonnier (France).

Considerable discussion occurred regarding various international approaches to the preparation of personnel. Hulek (Poland) commented that with regard to international training activities, it is recognized that everywhere in the world, there is learning that can take place that will have value in other situations. He then presented four approaches for conducting international training. First, he described sending students to other countries. One difficulty with this approach, Hulek said, is that often the training situation is vastly different from the cultural and other conditions that exist in the home country. Alzate (Columbia) pointed out that in many instances the discrepancy is caused by a difference in the types and availability of resources.

The second option is when carefully selected experts provide training in a nation other than their own. Hulek suggested that this may be the best approach, but that in order for it to be successful, the receiving situations must be prepared. The third approach is exchange programs between nations, which Hulek described as being very expensive. The formal and informal exchange of literature is the fourth approach described by Hulek. One problem noted by Hulek is that not all authors write in a manner that enhances the usability of their work in countries other than their own. Paraskevopoulos presented a fifth approach which involves inviting experts back to their country of origin, individuals who when in their original country were in special education but subsequently emigrated elsewhere.

Chua emphasized that from the perspective of developing nations, individuals trained in other nations should include teacher educators who could then train larger numbers of local special education teachers. Haskell indicated that regardless of the approach used in training, there must be sensitivity to the skills that already exist in the local situation. A concern about training raised by Sundberg (UNESCO) is that the majority of sophisticated training that occurs is provided in the major cities or capitals of the world and more seldom gets beyond those boundaries in developing countries.

One other view about training was indicated by Dobbins (Wales) who said that trainers of personnel must be aware of the situation in which their students will work and familiarize themselves with those situations. Finally, Mitchell observed that basic to training personnel is that everything is in a constant state of change and, consequently, students must be taught how to change and how to cope with change, as well.

The Improvement and Facilitating of Research Activities and the Application of Research Findings

That there is presently a great deal of research occurring internationally regarding the education of exceptional youth was agreed upon by the discussants. Jorgensen commented, however, that despite the volume of such activity, there remains a general need for improved quality of the research and that more research attention should be devoted to narrowly drawn issues within a programmatic effort. As general examples, he indicated the severely handicapped including the deaf-blind. Bissonnier mentioned high need areas as the severely retarded, autistic and multiply handicapped. Mittler (England), among others, pointed out the need for the improved exchange of research information, the need for elevating

the quality of much ongoing and future research activities and researchers, and the necessity for consideration of internationally based collaborative research activities as well as the international exchange of research scholars. Hardy presented the view that international cooperation in research should focus upon basic research in part to reduce irrelevant duplication as opposed to planned replication. Geer called for changing all ongoing research centers in education to include some activities regarding exceptional youth. The relationship between basic and applied research was discussed by the Round Table discussants. Egg pointed out that this issue has implications that are as basic as is the definition of research. She and McKenna urged that attention be devoted to the translation of research findings into classroom application. Also in agreement was Mittler, but he also emphasized that practitioners should, in fact, be partners in the research activity. Bissonnier called for the conducting of research in varied settings. Alzate cautioned about the casual widespread application of research findings from one country to another and suggested consideration of a prior step in which individual nations would be the settings for replication research. Yamaguchi (Japan), in a related comment, reported the difficulty often faced by nations attempting to use research reports from other countries which are in foreign languages. Bissionnier emphasized the need for more selection of circulated information and the availability of such reports in the United Nations languages. Hulek expanded this concern by raising the potential difficulty of international application of research findings because of technological differences among nations.

Improvement in International Communication

Throughout the Round Table discussions a number of suggestions were raised concerning the need for a variety of mechanisms to improve international communication in special education. Bissonnier commented that while there existed many national and international organizations, he felt the need for a Council of World Organizations or, at least, a particular and permanent commission in the existing "Council of World Organizations Interested in the Handicapped" (CWOIH), that would focus solely on special education. Chua called for an international membership organization that would focus solely on special education. A number of discussants felt there should be more international meetings such as the World Congress. Jorgensen cautioned, however, that many special educators are faced with having too many meetings to attend and that while he agreed there should be more international meetings such as the World Congress and others with more specific foci, a two year international conference calendar should be developed and disseminated indicating two years of events. He expressed similar concern about publications indicating the impossibility of keeping up with the literature and called for a concentration of such information and a consequent targeting of significant data for dissemination to the field. Also suggested was topical international conferences with carefully selected participants. Chua encouraged international regional conferences in order to share limited resources and solve common problems. He also suggested a comprehensive listing be made of all institutions in the world that offered training courses in special education, specifying admission requirements. Geer suggested the need for more World Congresses, but called for more international planning meetings between such conferences.

The discussants noted the need for greater cooperation in the exchange of information in the areas of research, teaching methods, and materials. Hulek and others indicated that a variety of activities were going on regionally and internationally in this regard. The discussants felt, however, that such activities needed to be strengthened and discussion was held concerning the need for a more highly specific international clearinghouse pertaining to special education. An observer suggested, and Round Table discussants discussed, the idea of an international competition to identify effective practices and activities in the education of exceptional children. The award-winning practices and activities would then be internationally disseminated.

Another observer suggested the need to train and develop a core of internationalists in special education noting that most individuals involved in international efforts in special education operate from a national base and have little training in international needs or activities. The delegates expressed some interest in the development of this idea. An observer suggested the need to create an international "think tank" to explore solutions to problems in the education of exceptional youth. Sundberg discussed UNESCO's special education activities, particularly in regard to technical assistance, training, research (primarily in policy), publications and dissemination. The Round Table was supportive of what UNESCO has done but was concerned about its limited resources and several discussants called for efforts to strengthen UNESCO's activities. Egg expressed concern that UNESCO is only able to provide assistance if governments request such assistance. As discussed, UNESCO assistance is not available to private groups nor

can it outreach to nations to encourage them to direct more activity to the education of handicapped children. Sisk (United States) suggested that UNESCO give consideration to incorporating gifted and talented youth within its work in special education.

Mehta suggested that CEC and other organizations should increase and develop regular communication with the top education officials throughout the world. Other delegates suggested that policymakers in countries throughout the world should be invited and encouraged to participate in meetings like the World Congress.

Principles Regarding International Information and Assistance Systems

As the Round Table discussion progressed, a basic set of principles emerged regarding future cooperative international efforts. These were presented to the discussants, discussed and approved, and are as follows:

1. Change is occurring worldwide in matters concerning education of exceptional children.
2. A base of knowledge and experience concerning aspects of educating exceptional children exists in all nations of the world.
3. All nations have knowledge and experience in areas that may be of value to other nations lacking such knowledge or experience.
4. Even in the world base of experience and knowledge, there may remain common areas of need for which no nation has sufficient knowledge or experience.

Given these premises, an emergent principle may be that if the goal is to be attained the needs of individuals, groups and nations must be identified. The determination of these needs must be sensitive to the following issues:

1. Developmental needs;

2. Cultural factors;

3. Consumer applicability;

4. Variations in resources.

Suggested Future Cooperative International Activities

Throughout the Round Table sessions and as has been indicated in the content summary, both discussants and observers made various suggestions as to needed cooperative international efforts regarding the education of exceptional youth. The list of these indicated below was presented to the discussants and observers at the concluding session of the Round Table.

1. The creation of an international world body concerning the education of exceptional children;

2. The creation of a Council of World Organizations on the education of the handicapped;

3. The creation of an International Clearinghouse on Research, Information and Materials;

4. The planning and conducting of international meetings including those which may be topical and/or regional;

5. The creation of an international competition for effective practices and activities with subsequent dissemination of those selected;

6. The development of international special educators (internationalists);

7. The initiation of efforts to encourage greater attention to the education of exceptional children and their needs by international

governing bodies such as UNESCO, UNICEF and OAS, by undertaking such activities as:

a. strengthening and expanding their total efforts,

b. incorporating the needs of exceptional children within the UNICEF sponsored Year of the Child,

c. monitoring the implementation and compliance to the policies of such bodies pertaining to exceptional children;

8. The production of a comprehensive list and description of higher education programs in special education throughout the world.

9. The identification and description of criteria for initial personnel selection and standards regarding training programs;

10. The establishment of personnel exchange programs including researchers;

11. The creation of an international "think tank" with limited participants from each nation to explore solutions to problems regarding the education of exceptional youth;

12. The design and establishment of research resource centers in all nations.

The Year of the Child

The Round Table discussants reviewed the United Nations General Assembly resolution proclaiming 1979 as the "International Year of the Child." The resolution calls upon nations throughout the world to undertake an examination of their programs for children and to initiate efforts for their improvement and expansion in order to meet the needs of their children. This year, 1978, has been designated as the International Year of the Child planning year. Commissions in each nation are

at present planning the activities to be undertaken in their respective countries in 1979.

As listed earlier, the International Year of the Child was identified by the Round Table discussants as an activity in which international cooperation regarding the education of exceptional youth could occur. A task force of Round Table discussants and observers met to propose recommendations regarding what could be done to promote the education of exceptional children during the "International Year of the Child." This report was presented and agreed to by the full Round Table.

The subcommittee urged CEC to consider developing communication with UNESCO, individual national commissions, governments, and organizations, the message that it was the sense of the World Congress that education of exceptional children be a priority issue during the "International Year of the Child." Further, they suggested that if possible CEC should assist or cause to assist individuals and organizations in initiating or pursuing this objective by providing information to them about the International Year of the Child and the role of national commissions, suggesting methods of influencing the commissions and also presenting ideas about program activities that might be conducted within nations to advance the education of exceptional children. The task force report further proposed that again, if possible, CEC should collect or cause to be collected and circulate or cause to be circulated examples of the activities undertaken by individual nations concerning the education of exceptional children under the auspices of the International Year of the Child and to share that information

internationally. Finally, the report called for consideration of the development of reporting the status of exceptional children throughout the world and urged that CEC, UNESCO and other organizations cooperate in this endeavor.